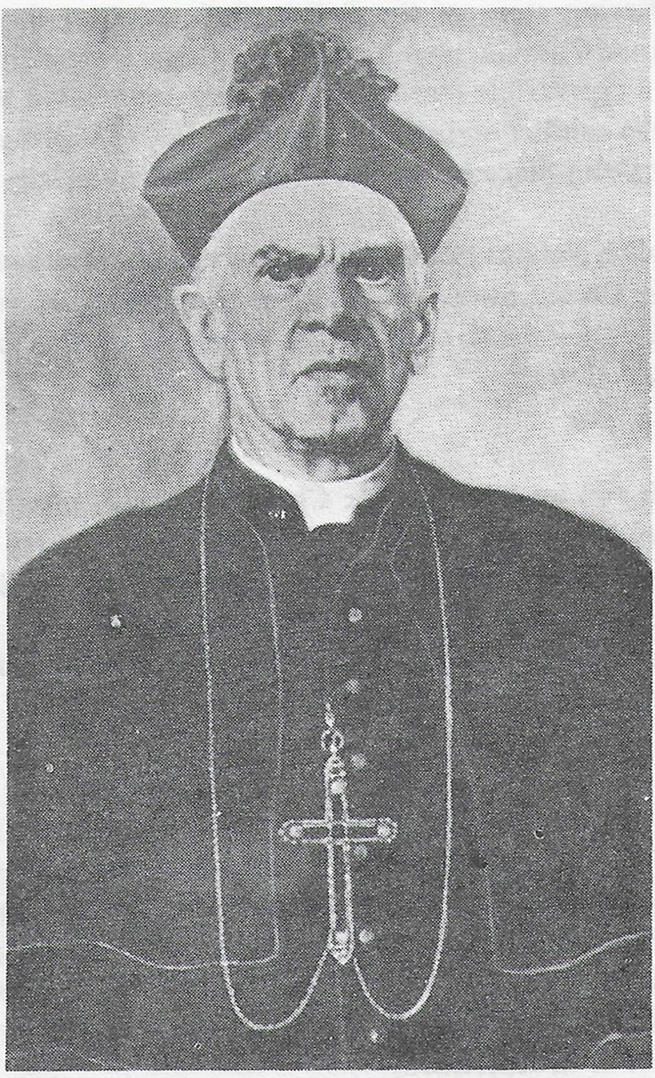


MOST REV. FRANCIS HODUR
Organizer of the Polish National Catholic Church

The Polish National Catholic Church

PRAWDĄ WALKĄ PRACĄ

This tract is a reprint of an article entitled "The Polish National Catholic Church of American Origin" written by Helen Buckley and printed in the May 1958 edition of OUTLOOK published by the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. We, of the Polish National Catholic Church, hereby, express our grateful appreciation to the National Council of Churches of Christ for granting us, on March 31, 1961, permission to reproduce this article in this present form. Partially revised and additional information supplied by the Polish National Catholic Church, March, 1971 and October, 1972.

The stirring story of the Polish National Catholic Church of America and Canada, member of the National Council of Churches, is one of irrepressible freedom. It is a story of belated Reformation with all the conflict and struggle that marked that phase of Church history, taking place in the 20th century on American shores.

The Polish National Catholic Church was not founded in Poland, but in the United States of America. From the U.S. missionaries went back to Poland to establish branches of this independent "national" church.

Though still an infant in the Christian world, this Church had phenomenal growth. From 1897 with little money but great enthusiasm, 162 local churches have been organized in this country to date. In most of them three services are held on Sunday to serve a membership of 272,082. Also, before communism cut off the diocese in Poland in 1951, parishes in that country numbered 122.

The drama began in the 9th century when Cyril and Methodius brought Christianity from Constantinople to the scattered Slavic peoples giving them their first Slavic alphabet, translating the Scriptures for them into the common language, and conducting worship in that tongue. Thus, Christianity was accepted by the Slavic people as a national religion, a Church of a people united by language and a spirit of brotherhood.

In the year 965, when Otto the Great had already incorporated other Slavic nations into the Holy Roman Empire, the Poles accepted Roman Catholicism in an attempt to ward off one pretext for German intervention. Their Slavic liturgy was soon replaced by Latin services. This and other encroachments stirred them to seek independence when the Reformation was stirring in other lands. But the tide was stemmed and with the dismemberment of Poland and alien rule, many Poles fled to other countries.

An increasing stream of immigrants poured into the United States until nearly a million Poles resided there in the decade preceding World War I. They brought with them their religious fervor, their dream of freedom and sought to recreate the community life they had known in the homeland. There the parish was the center of everything, where they not only prayed with family, relatives and neighbors, but where they participated in community activities and festivals and sung music half-popular, half-liturgical, the beautiful Polish Christmas carols, the Kolenda, and tragic Gorzkie Zale Lamentations in memory of Christ's passion. In the U.S., as in Poland, the Church was an integral part of daily life.

At the turn of the century there were nearly 200 Polish parishes scattered throughout the U.S. The demand for new parishes outstripped the Roman Catholic Church's willingness or ability to create them. There were no Polish bishops and the Poles said the Irish-German hierarchy had little concern for their welfare. They saw themselves relegated to second class membership with no rights, only obligations.

They could not establish a church of their own without securing the bishop's approval and they had to accept the pastor he appointed. When the houses of worship they had erected in the new country through toil and sacrifice were declared to be the sole possession of the bishops of the various dioceses, they were outraged. They particularly resented orders to give up teaching the Polish language and culture in their parish schools.

Discontent blazed into open revolt and mass upheavals took place in numerous Polish communities, among them Chicago, Buffalo and Cleveland, as well as smaller communities in New England and New Jersey.

ST. STANISLAUS CATHEDRAL
SCRANTON, PA.

In Scranton, Pa., a parish delegation of Polish anthracite miners and factory workers, who made up the congregation of the large and imposing Sacred Heart Church to which they had contributed hard-earned funds, requested lay representation in parish affairs. They were refused. A group then tried to block entrance of the priest into the Church. The diocesan bishop called the police and a riot developed. Fifty-two persons were arrested.

Within weeks, the alienated groups organized a new parish and a few months later purchased land for a new church. They invited a young Polish-born priest, Father Francis Hodur, who had already endeared h mself by participating in social work, publishing one of the first parish newspapers, and otherwise showing his concern for their welfare, to accept leadership of their flock. It was a fateful decision for him and he knew it. On the evening of Sunday, March 14th, 1897, he came to Scranton, attended a meeting of the alienated group and took charge of the parish and on March 21st, 1897, he celebrated Mass in the basement of the unfinished structure

that was to become St. Stanislaus, mother Church of the new movement. Two hundred fifty families formally united with the new parish.

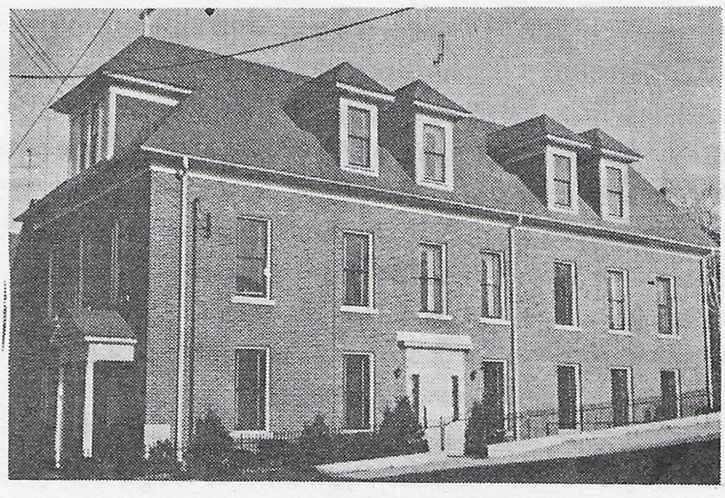
Scarcely five months later the movement leaped beyond Scranton and began its march through the Pennsylvania anthracite fields. Other dissident groups turned to Scranton for guidance. In April, 1897, Father Hodur, a believer in the power of the press, started a weekly paper and in it poured out advice and encouragement. In February, 1898, he went to Rome and sought recognition of American-Polish problems which he could not get from the American hierarchy. He was unsuccessful and the result was complete severence between Scranton and Rome. Father Hodur read the document to his congregation, then burned it and threw the ashes into the brook below the hill on which St. Stanislaus Cathedral stands. To the tolling of bells, people sang, prayed aloud, embraced each other and started their "new, free and dangerously expendable life."

On Christmas Eve, 1900, the walls of St. Stanislaus Church resounded for the first time to Mass sung in the Polish language. Other Polish parishes followed suit.

Mass facing the people was introduced by Bishop Hodur on the third Sunday of June, 1931 in St. Stanislaus Cathedral. This practise is continued in the Mother Cathedral Parish at Scranton and has spread throughout the Church.

In September, 1904, the first Synod of the new Polish National Catholic Church was held in Scranton with 147 clerical and lay delegates representing two dozen parishes and 20,000 adherents in five states. Father Hodur was chosen Bishop-elect and administrator of the new Church. People believed in him. They saw he was a true man of God. The Latin service books were ordered translated into Polish.

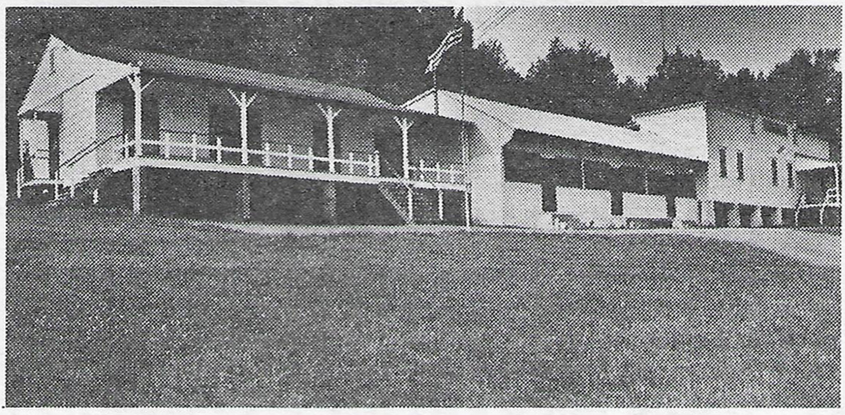
A seminary was established in 1907 now known as the Savonarola Theological Seminary to prepare men for the priesthood of the Church.



The present Savonarola Theological Seminary, 1031 Cedar Ave., Scranton, Pa. Purchased in 1926, enlarged, renovated and dedicated November 23, 1950

In 1908, a fraternal society was established -- Spojnia -- also known as the Polish National Union of America, a sister organization of the Church, its purpose being to serve the insurance needs

of the communicants of the Church. Spojnia also carries extensive social, educational and humanitarian activities, gives financial aid to many students and youth organizations and has published countless numbers of parish school books. A large dairy farm was purchased in 1929, located at Waymart, Pa., containing 450 acres of land. It maintains a home for the aged, a children's camp and an extensive youth activity area. Spojnia owns its own printing plant where it publishes its own weekly newspaper, Straż (The Guard), prints the official organ of the Church, Rola Boża (God's Field), the women's publication, Polka, plus doing commercial job printing in addition to prayer books, catechisms and all other printed material needed in the Church and Spojnia. A 600 acre tract of land called "Warsaw Village" located in Thornhurst, Pa.,



CHILDREN'S ENCAMPMENT

in the famed Pocono Mountains, by virtue of dedication to the Church, was bequeathed by the late Mrs. Josephine Walentynowicz (Valentine) in April, 1943. It contains summer cottages and is used as a vacation spot.

The first Synod defined the purpose of this Church as follows:

1. To sanctify people by introducing them to the living Christ.
2. To preach the pure Gospel of Jesus, interpreting it with sound knowledge.
3. To help mankind create a church which, in living practice, would meet the standards of Jesus Christ.

The new constitution had a decidedly American flavor. The source of sovereignty was declared to rest in each democratically organized parish, which owned, controlled and administered all parish property. The parish had a voice in selecting its pastor, it paid pastoral and other salaries and had the right to elect to the General Synod one delegate for every 50 active members of the congregation. Ultimate and virtually complete authority was handed to the church's legislative body, the General Synod. Between Synods, the executive body known as the Supreme Council of the Church is the highest governing body and is comprised of: The Prime Bishop, the active Bishops, one priest from each diocese, two elected lay persons (male or female) from each diocese, two delegates-at-large, the treasurer of the Church and the president of the Polish National Union (Spojnia).

The First General Synod of 1904 gave unquestioned support to the ancient Christian concept of Apostolic Succession, according to which no man could legitimately exercise episcopal authority without receiving that authority from a bishop who himself was in direct line of descent from the Apostles. Father Hodur was

consecrated September 29, 1907, in St. Gertrude's Cathedral, Utrecht, Holland. The consecrators were Most Rev. Gerard Gul, Archbishop of Utrecht and head of the Old Catholic Churches of Europe; Rt. Rev. John Van Thiel, Bishop of Haarlem; and Rt. Rev. Michael Bartholomew Spit, Bishop of Deventer.

The Utrecht rite symbolized the establishment of Old Catholic intercommunion -- a form of spiritual alliance between the American and European churches, and the passing on of Apostolic Succession. Thereafter the American denomination followed its own way without further recourse to Europe for assistance.

From 1907 the Polish National Catholic Church is in full communion with the Old Catholic Church and is a member of the Utrecht Union of Old Catholic Churches.

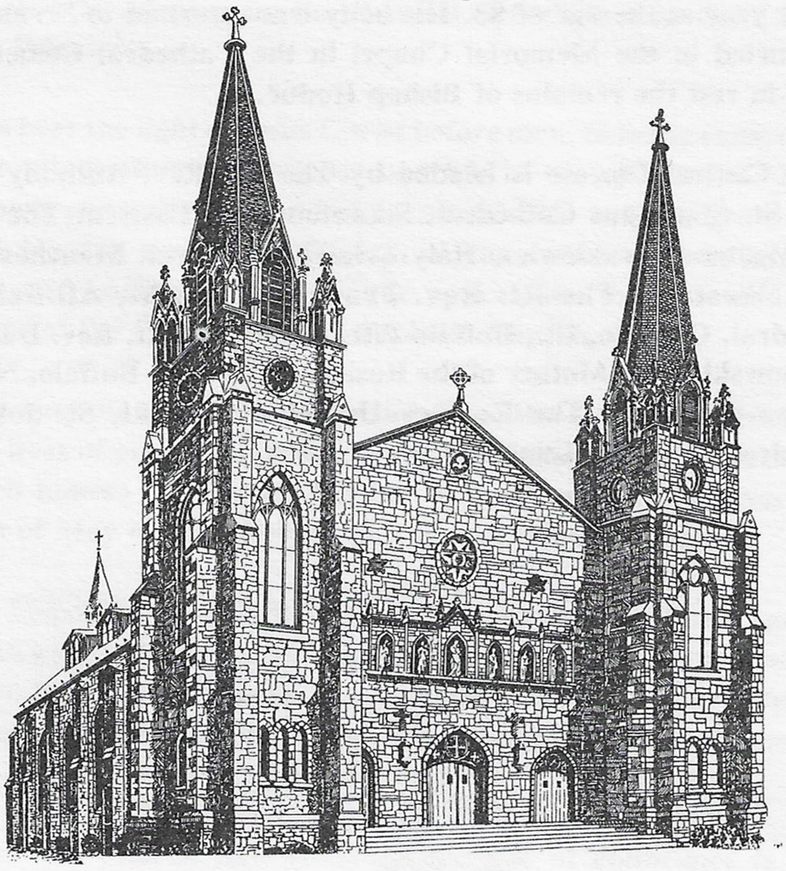
Within 20 years the membership of the new church had grown beyond all expectation. Seceding groups of Roman Catholic Slovaks and Lithuanians in New Jersey and Pennsylvania sought affiliation. New parishes appeared in New England, Minnesota and Missouri. To meet his problems of far-flung administration, Prime Bishop Hodur consecrated four additional bishops.

This growth was not achieved without generous giving by faithful parishioners, often at considerable personal sacrifice, and gifts of labor as well as money. Many congregations assumed their church mortgages so that they owed nothing to anybody but themselves. In the depression of the 30's, members of the Duluth, Minn., congregation mortgaged their own homes and saved their Church from liquidation. During a veritable scourge of fires, memberships doggedly rebuilt their churches. People do not desert what they own and have won by sacrifice.

After World War I, in sending relief to aid the new republic of Poland, the American Polish National Catholic Church also sent missionaries. The work took root despite opposition by the established Church, police and civil authorities. Before the Nazi invasion blighted all growth, the Church claimed a membership in Poland of 50,000 persons, organized in a diocese of 56 parishes.

After the eclipse of the war and loss of one third of its priests, the Church achieved a remarkably swift revival and by early 1950 had, as had been said, 122 parishes in the homeland staffed, however, by only 70 priests. In 1951 the Bishop of Poland became a victim of communism and died in a communist prison at Warsaw. The Church in Poland is now headed by the Rt. Rev. Julian Pekala. Following World War II, the Polish National Catholic Church serves only in an advisory capacity to the Church of Poland.

The outward symbol of the oneness of all churches within the Christian Catholic family which had been demonstrated at Utrecht in 1907, was demonstrated again in 1946 when the Polish National Catholic Church entered into intercommunion with the Anglican Church of England and the Episcopal Church of the U.S. and Canada.



Holy Mother of the Rosary Cathedral
BUFFALO, N.Y.

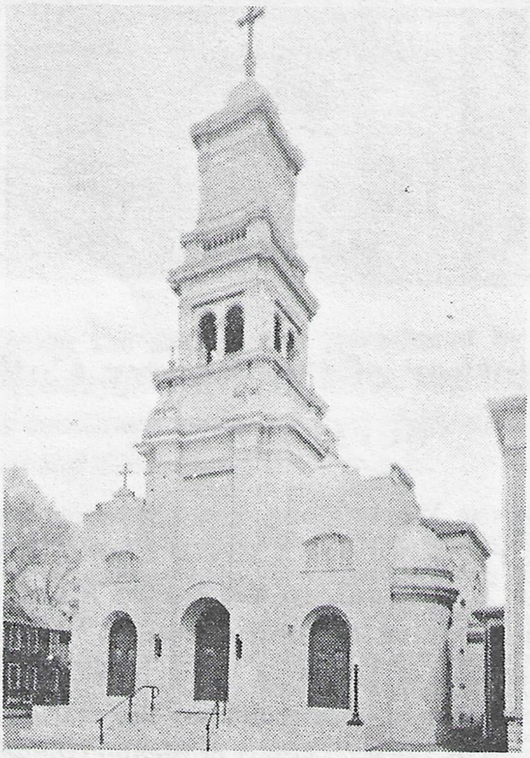
In 1948 when the World Council of Churches was founded in Amsterdam the Polish National Catholic Church was represented by Bishop John Z. Jasinski. In the United States as well as in Poland the Polish National Catholic Church has co-operated in the general activities of the local Church federations except in sacramental functions. Membership in the National Council of Churches, delayed by the long illness of Bishop Hodur, was granted at the Council's General Assembly in St. Louis, December, 1958.

Prime Bishop Hodur, active to the last day of his earthly life as head of the Polish National Catholic Church, made 14 trips to the homeland. In 1936 a lasting illness claimed him and for eight years prior to his death he was blind. Despite these handicaps and the infirmities of age, he nevertheless preached to his congregation in Scranton by means of a loud-speaking system which carried his voice from his bedside into the church until February 8th, 1953. A week later, on February 16th, he died at the age of 86. Three bishops of the Episcopal Church took part in his funeral services: Rt. Rev. Charles Street of Chicago, Rt. Rev. Frederick Warneke of Bethlehem, Pa., and Rt. Rev. Lauriston Scaife of Buffalo, New York.

The successor to Prime Bishop Francis Hodur was the Most Rev. Leon Grochowski having been chosen to succeed Bishop Hodur at the General Synod held in Scranton, Pa. in 1949. Upon assuming his duties on February 16th, 1953 as Primate of the Church, he also headed the Central Diocese and was pastor of the Mother Cathedral. He too maintained headquarters in Scranton. Not unlike Bishop Hodur, Bishop Grochowski journied to Poland frequently, having made 18 trips abroad, his last in 1969 at which time he was stricken with a heart attack that claimed his life on July 17th

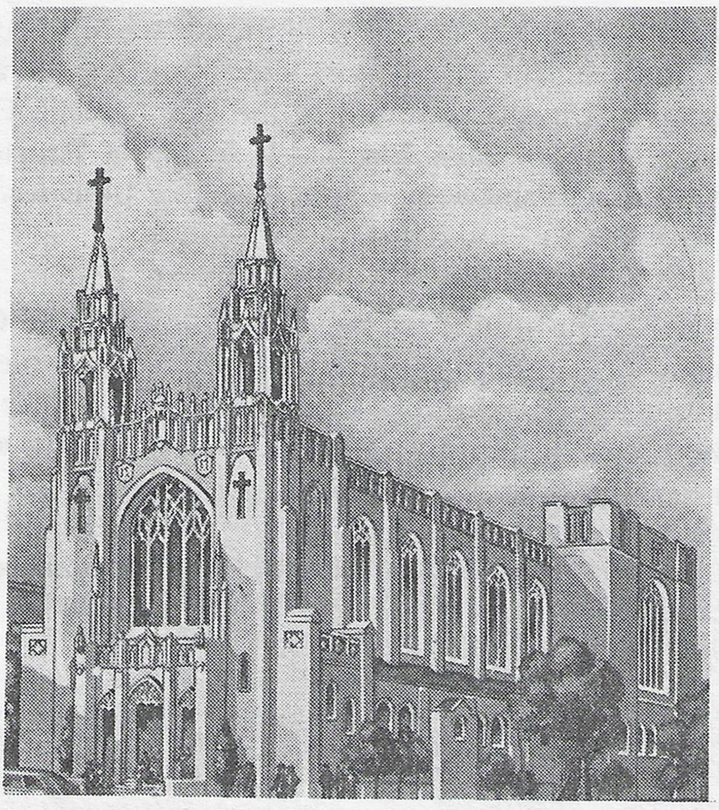
of that year at the age of 83. His body was returned to Scranton and buried in the Memorial Chapel in the Cathedral Cemetery where-in rest the remains of Bishop Hodur.

The Central Diocese is headed by The Rt. Rev. Anthony M. Rysz, St. Stanislaus Cathedral, Scranton, Pa., Eastern: The Rt. Rev. Walter Slowakiewicz, Holy Trinity Cathedral, Manchester, N.H., Western: The Rt. Rev. Francis Rowinski, All Saints Cathedral, Chicago, Ill., Buffalo-Pittsburgh: The Rt. Rev. Daniel Cyganowski, Holy Mother of the Rosary Cathedral, Buffalo, N.Y. and the Canadian: The Rt. Rev. Joseph Nieminski, St. John's Cathedral, Toronto, Canada.



HOLY TRINITY CATHEDRAL
MANCHESTER, N.H.

In October, 1967 during the 12th General Synod held in Manchester, N.H., the formation of the Canadian Diocese was approved. Also, three senior priests were elected as candidates for the office of bishop, namely: The Very Reverends Anthony M. Rysz, Walter A. Slowakiewicz and Joseph I. Nieminski. All were consecrated in St. Stanislaus Cathedral on June 26, 1968 by the Most Rev. Leon Grochowski as consecrator with The Rt. Rev. Thaddeus F. Zielinski, D.D. and The Rt. Rev. Francis C. Rowinski as co-consecrators. At the conclusion of the Rites, in charging the newly consecrated with their duties, Bishop Grochowski announced that Bishop Rysz would assume the office of co-adjutor of the Central Diocese, Bishop Slowakiewicz was appointed a Missionary Bishop and Bishop Nieminski was appointed Bishop Ordinary of the New Canadian Diocese. Bishop Rysz assumed the office of Bishop Ordinary of the Central Diocese upon the death of Bishop Grochowski on July 17, 1969. He was formally installed on October 18, 1970. Bishop Slowakiewicz was appointed Bishop Ordinary of the Eastern Diocese on November 9, 1971 and formally installed on April 30, 1972. Bishop Nieminski was formally installed on June 30, 1968.



ALL SAINTS CATHEDRAL
CHICAGO, ILL.

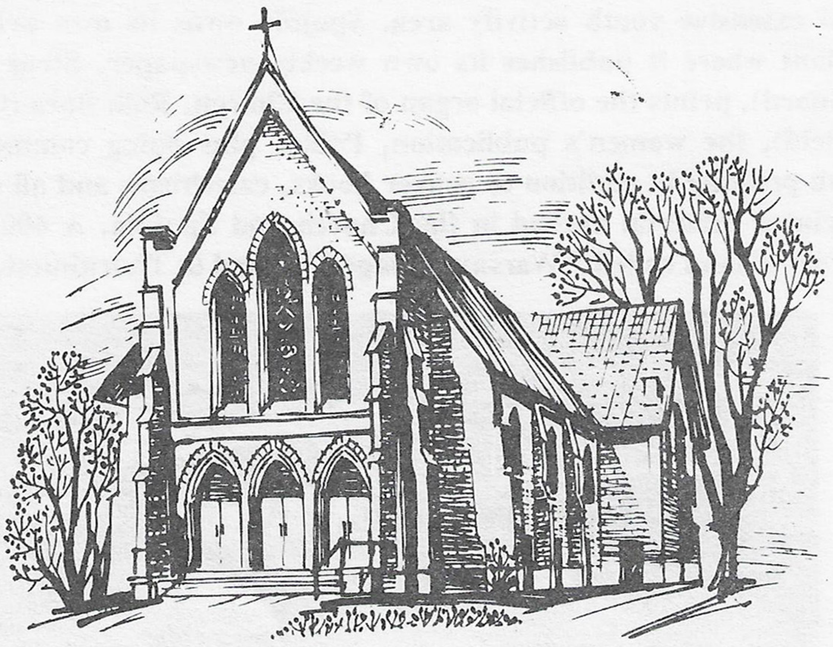
The 12th General Synod was an impressionable one in the history of the Church for in addition to the candidates for bishops it voted upon and the acceptance of the new diocese, the successor to Bishop Grochowski was chosen, namely: The Rt. Rev. Thaddeus F. Zielinski, D.D., Bishop Ordinary of the Buffalo-Pittsburgh Diocese. Immediately upon the death of Bishop Grochowski, Bishop Zielinski assumed the Primacy of the Church and as of this writing heads the Church with headquarters in Scranton, Pa.

At the 13th General Synod held in Toronto, Canada, October, 1971, The Very Rev. Daniel F. Cyganowski was elected as candidate for bishop. He was consecrated to the Episcopacy in All Saints Cathedral, Chicago, Ill. on Nov. 30, 1971 by the Most Rev. Thaddeus F. Zielinski as consecrator with The Rt. Rev. Anthony M. Rysz and The Rt. Rev. Francis Rowinski as co-consecrators. He was appointed to head the Buffalo-Pittsburgh Diocese on Feb. 1, 1972 and formally installed on May 7, 1972.

There are 162 parishes and 156 ordained clergy having charges today, with a membership, as stated of 272,082. Sunday Church Schools of Christian Living are conducted in every parish in the U.S. and Canada. Many parishes have a parish school which holds classes after the regular public school hours and on Saturdays. These schools have a two-fold purpose: to teach the Polish language and to impart religious instruction.

The Synod of July 1958, Chicago, Illinois, decreed that, where expedient, parishes may institute the practice of having one Mass in English in addition to the Polish. After proper preparation, the English Mass was introduced in 1961 and is generally practiced throughout the Church.

The rites and ceremonies resemble those of the Roman Rite. Most of the services have been retained although suggestions have been made for changes. In 1928, Bishop Francis Bonczak, editor of Polska Odrodzona, a weekly then published in Krakow, Poland, wrote:



ST. JOHN the BAPTIST CATHEDRAL
TORONTO, ONT. CANADA

"The form of worship is like style in architecture. It is a reflection of the soul of the worshippers, an outward expression of their inner devotion to and adoration of their object of worship -- God. The form of worship, therefore, should not be antiquated, stiff, imitative, but natural, sublime, elevating. A reform in this particular is very much in order. A service of worship should be beautiful, brief, simple and inspiring. The liturgy of the Polish National Catholic Church should be light in form and deep in content. It should contain prayers and readings expressive of the deep religious experience of our Polish poets and writers. What they said and wrote flowed from truly Polish hearts. The rich bequest of their thought and experience should be incorporated into our religious life and into their worship."

Seven sacraments are practiced, with baptism and confirmation reckoned as one sacrament since confirmation is the completion of baptism and The Word of God being proclaimed as a Sacrament.

Two forms of confession are now in general use; private confession for children and young people up to the age of 16 and a general public confession for adults. Three forms of the administration of the Sacrament of Holy Communion are practiced in the Church; by consecrated bread alone, by intinction, which is the dipping of the consecrated bread into the consecrated wine and by bread and wine separately.

The doctrine of the Polish National Catholic Church is founded on the Holy Scripture, Holy Traditions, and four Ecumenical Synods of the undivided Church. This doctrine is expanded in

the Credo as adopted by the General Synods and in the Eleven Great Principles.

"To bear the light of Jesus Christ before men, to bring constantly to our minds that our purpose is a life in the spirit of God, in the spirit of truth, love and righteousness, to help us grow like Christ Himself through fulfillment of our duties to God, family, nation and humanity -- that is the appeal, the mandate and the purpose of the Polish National Catholic Church."

Believing that the work of the Indestructible Church is reflected in the lives of great men and women, the Polish National Catholic Church honors the Blessed Mother of our Lord and reserves the month of May of each year to pay special tribute to her.

The Polish National Catholic Church is something infinitely greater than a protest against doctrines and dogmas of any authoritarian church; it is a living expression of positive ideals and principles. We are not just building a new Church, but a Church that is closer to the spirit and teaching of Christ.

That this Church has withstood the test of endurance is not the only reason for its being. It was not built by the caprice of man, but by the Divine Will of God. This is the test of Christ's Church, a test recognized by Gamaliel when he spoke in behalf of the persecuted Apostles and said, "If this work be of men, it will be overthrown; but if it is of God, ye will not be able to overthrow it."

The first and most important task of the Polish National Catholic Church is the sanctification and salvation of the Polish people and all others in union with this Church. Man is sanctified when he follows the guidance of the Church and uses the spiritual means which the Church received from God through Jesus Christ, our Lord. For there is but one God and one Mediator between God and man, Jesus Christ!

Listing of Bishops in order of consecration:

The Most Rev. Francis Hodur, September 29, 1907
Died -- February 16, 1953

The Most Rev. Leon Grochowski, August 17, 1924
Died -- July 17, 1969

The Rt. Rev. Francis Bonczak, August 17, 1924
Died -- September 21, 1967

The Rt. Rev. Valentine Gawrychowski, August 17, 1924
Died -- February 1, 1934

The Rt. Rev. John Gritenas, August 17, 1924
Died -- December 28, 1929

The Rt. Rev. John Z. Jasinski, June 7, 1928
Died -- April 2, 1951

The Rt. Rev. John Misiaszek, August 26, 1936
Died -- May 1, 1972

The Rt. Rev. Joseph Padewski, August 26, 1936
Died -- May 10, 1951

The Rt. Rev. Joseph Lesniak, November 16, 1937
Retired

The Rt. Rev. Joseph Soltysiak, April 23, 1952
Died -- July 9, 1973

The Most Rev. Thaddeus F. Zielinski, September 2, 1954

The Rt. Rev. Joseph Kardas, September 2, 1954
Died -- July 7, 1958

The Rt. Rev. Francis Rowinski, May 9, 1959

The Rt. Rev. Eugene W. Magyar, June 29, 1963
Died -- October 19, 1968

The Rt. Rev. Anthony Rysz, June 26, 1968

The Rt. Rev. Joseph Nieminski, June 26, 1968

The Rt. Rev. Walter Slowakiewicz, June 26, 1968

The Rt. Rev. Daniel F. Cyganowski, November 30, 1971

PRIME BISHOP

The Most Rev. Thaddeus F. Zielinski